Jon Commers, Chair





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To: Comprehensive Planning Committee

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Subject: Industrial zoning study – panel discussion

A panel discussion on the preliminary draft recommendation for the industrial zoning study was held on November 17 at the Goodwill-Easter Seals facility in the West Midway. A list of panel members is attached.

Approximately 20 people attended and included business representatives who are members of Saint Paul chambers of commerce and community residents, mostly from the Union Park and St. Anthony Park neighborhoods.

Panelists began by describing their expertise in industrial development and their general observations about industrial development, particularly in an urban setting. Most of the discussion between the panelists, as well as in response to questions and comments from the audience, focused on the proposed revisions to the design guidelines. There was little discussion, per se, on the proposed changes to the industrial use list or to the proposed revision to the Zoning Code section on the numbers of housing units to be permitted in industrial districts.

An underlying theme in panelists' comments was the dynamic of industrial areas today: Service businesses dominate, but the rising costs of manufacturing overseas might force manufacturers to return their operations to this country. Access to the highway network is very important when a business seeks a location for its operations; there may be sufficient industrial land in the city, but not enough land near highway intersections. A majority of the opportunity for business growth is in the "middle ground," or the supply chains for businesses manufacturing or processing the end product.

The proposed changes in the design guidelines for the IR district drew significant attention. Some comments were:

- While aesthetics and function were not mutually exclusive and there could be a "meeting" in the middle, design features are not counted in the equity of an industrial building. They are not factored into the appraisal.
- Design standards are needed, but so is flexibility in how they are applied to individual projects.
- There should be flexibility and attention to the function of the building.
- Some materials proposed for prohibition, such as concrete block, are well designed and costs more than other, permitted, materials. The list of prohibitions may be too prescriptive.
- Parking only in the rear of a building (as opposed to having two rows of parking in the front of a building) presents such problems as – clients don't want to go through a

warehouse to the business office; walking through the working part of a building might compromise a business' need for confidentiality; most people drive and need a place to park; vendors coming to a business need parking. Community members challenged the statement that parking should be allow along the building frontage.

- Manufacturing cannot operate in a multi-story building. One audience member challenged this assumption, citing the number of mult-story manufacturing buildings in such cities as New York and Seattle.
- Building office buildings up to the street is not problematic but building industrial buildings up to the street presents problems.

There was a brief discussion of where the IR district could be used, in addition to its current locations (Phalen-Atlantic, the West Side near the river, and along University between the Raymond and Fairview stations).